

Developing a Task in the Context of a Task-Based Lesson

KOYAMA, Eiji

This study was designed to investigate how task-based language teaching (TBLT) is useful in a classroom setting and to what extent it can influence learners of English in ESL or EFL situations. For this research I will divide developing a task in the context of a task-based lesson into several parts so that I can analyze and understand how influential TBLT is in language learning and teaching.

First of all, in order to make TBLT clear on what it can do under the classroom setting, I would like to make a brief introduction about the rationale, principles and benefits of TBLT by referring to the previous studies or the relevant literatures. Nunan (2004) stated that the concept of 'task' has become an important element in syllabus design, classroom teaching and learner assessment. He also asserted that TBLT has strengthened six principles and practices. Two of those principles that I think are the most significant for this study are an emphasis on learning to communicate through interaction in the target language and the provision of opportunities for learners to focus not only on language but also on the learning process itself. Willis (1996) explained that the target language is used by the learner for a communicative purpose (goal) in order to achieve an outcome. She defined that language in a communicative task is seen as bringing about an outcome through the exchange of meanings. As far as its meaning is concerned, Ellis (2003) articulated that a task requires learners to give primary attention to meaning and to make use of their own linguistic resources though the design of the task may predispose them to choose particular forms. As with more pedagogical tasks, Nunan (2004) regarded role plays, simulations, problem-solving tasks and information exchange tasks as an activation rationale. Interestingly, he followed that the task is designed not to provide learners with an opportunity to rehearse some out-of-class performance but to activate their emerging language skills. What's more, pointing out the fact that there is increasing interest in the world outside the classroom as an environment or settings for learning, Nunan also insisted that tasks using the community as a resource have three particular benefits. One of the important benefits that I think would be applicable for this task-based lesson is that the tasks provide learners with opportunities for genuine interactions which have a real-life point to them. His notion of the beneficial side of the task is based on the previous research done by Stevens (1987). All of these rationale, principles and benefits drawn from the previous studies on TBLT seem to be so persuasive that I can take the task into consideration by incorporating it in the classroom setting.

Learners for this task (The title: "Design Your Tourism Advertisement") are six international students from different countries with different cultural and social backgrounds. They are all

learning English at a language school which is similar to The University of Auckland English Language Academy. They are willing to enter the university right after the language program is finished. In this sense, they are so highly motivated to learn and master English quickly that they regard this learning environment as a sort of good starting point as well as the well-organized preparation for their future academic goal. Based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) presented by the Council of Europe (2001), the learners' general level of language use for this task is placed in B2 level that is considered to be independent users. As Nunan (2004) has pointed out, the CEFR defines three broad levels of language use (Basic User, Independent User and Proficient User) each of which is broken down into two further levels, giving six levels in all. He also followed that the table describing the general levels of language use provides global, behavioral descriptors for learners at each of these six levels. Both sources can be good indicators for me to check learners' level of language use for this task because they showed there are the detailed criteria for assessing learners' skills such as listening, reading, spoken interaction, spoken production and writing. From my perspective on these sources and my own experience that I have been teaching English for more than 17 years in Japan, the learners for whom this task is intended and participated can be ideal learners when I have to discuss and analyze what kind of task procedures would be reasonable in language learning. In addition, the six learners as international students with different backgrounds can be easily involved with negotiating of meaning, interacting with each other by using language to communicate their own encoding and decoding messages within this instructional context. I would like to let them engage in such an educational setting and then focus on how they can be actively learning with the help of pair-work as well as a teacher's feedback within an integrated learning environment (listening, reading, speaking, and writing).

I will make a description of the task involving the design features and the teaching procedures in this paragraph. As I have already talked about the title or the theme of the task like "Design Your Tourism Advertisement" along with the specific learners used in the study, I would like to break down the task into four parts: Pre-task, Task preparation, Task and Post-task so that I can justify each activity or task as a task.

First of all, pre-task can be assigned for this task and lasts for 10 minutes. It plays a significant role as a good starting point for the learners to know or guess what they will try to tackle on. At this stage, a teacher will ask them several questions (the questions will be also put in PowerPoint slides as shown in an appendix A) to elicit vocabularies, phrases and sentences from them. The first questions would be as follows: Do you like travelling? What do you like to do when you travel? The second ones would be: Now think of a place where you might like to visit. What attracts you to it? Food, museum or scenery? The teacher will use "bubble scheme," which is a way to put the words in, to encourage the learners to brainstorm creatively. After the brainstorming, a tourism

promotional video will be played. Here, I have chosen to use “100% Pure New Zealand” as a demo which lasts for about 2 minutes. Then the learners will be asked to share what they got from the video to test their ability in listening comprehension. The questions can be: What do you like the most about this promotional video? What do they want to promote in this video? At the final step, the learners will be given four tourism brochures about four different countries and places. The teacher will ask them to note down four things they can do based on the brochure during the reading. As those brochures feature something important to know about what to do, where to stay, where to eat and so on, which are shown in an appendix B, this activity seems to be a real-life setting where we often search for some information we need when we have to plan to go abroad for a week or so. This step will test the learners' reading ability to make sure to what extent they can understand the reading passage within the limited time.

Looking through the pre-task activities as a whole, some literatures give me an opportunity to take those tasks into good considerations on a rationale and demonstration basis. Willis (1996), drawing on six task categories as aspects of tasks, described that listing tasks tend to generate a lot of talk as learners explain their ideas. Here, brainstorming is also one of the processes involving the listing tasks that can help learners draw on their own knowledge and experience either as a class or in pairs. I think this idea would be supportive in paying attention to what they should consider at the very early stage of the task as the ice breaking time. Being given several yes-no questions and wh-questions to respond as well as some key verb vocabularies like travel, visit, attract, and the following noun vocabularies such as place, food, museum and scenery in PowerPoint slides, they have the time to prepare themselves well to come up with some more ideas so that they can produce longer sentences such as compound sentences or even complex sentences rather than just simple sentences in the next coming tasks. At the same time, the combination of open questions (wh-questions) and closed questions (yes/no questions) would be so helpful for them to elicit or to activate much more vocabularies including content words from their linguistic knowledge. Then, some suggestions presented by Clark (1987) could be good rationales for doing those tasks above. He suggested, in the context of a task-based curriculum of the Australian Language Levels (ALL) project, that language is used for acquiring information from more or less ‘public’ sources in the target language (e.g. books, magazines, newspapers, brochures, documents, signs, notices, films, television, slides, public announcements, lectures or written reports) and using this information in some way. He followed to claim that listening to, reading, and responding to creative and imaginative uses of the target language (e.g. stories, songs, drama) could motivate some learners to understand what kind of information or expressions they should know on a content basis. Based on the previous research, the demo video adapted from “100% Pure New Zealand” via YouTube on-line and the tourism brochure for this task are both instructional materials that can elicit listening and reading comprehension from the learners. The uses of the demo video and the brochure for the task

can lead to an input-based task defined by Nunan (2004). Here, the notion of 'an input-based task' is based on a task that requires interaction with and response to input, which is essentially focused on reading and listening that are both considered to be receptive skills. By activating the two language skills through this task, the teacher can let the learners be ready for the rest of the productive skills like speaking and writing followed by this pre-task.

Second, task preparation is set out for 2 minutes. It could be a facilitator for the learners to work on the following main task. Here, a teacher will ask the learners to work in pairs. For this setting, I have six learners, so there will be three groups in total. Then, the teacher will give instructions about what should be included in the advertisement (this will be on PowerPoint slides). The instructions are as follows: The advertisement should include a slogan; The advertisement should include at least four things to do. Here, according to Nunan (2004), tasks can be thought of as functions and context. He went on to say that they allow for functions (and grammar) to be activated in a particular communicative context. Those instructions above implicitly encourage the learners to engage themselves into two pedagogical tasks. Richards (2001), based on an analysis of communicative language use, proposed five pedagogical tasks: jigsaw tasks, information-gap tasks, problem-solving tasks, decision-making tasks and opinion exchange tasks. The very last two tasks could be applied to this task-based lesson because both decision-making and opinion exchange tasks require the learners to negotiate, discuss or even exchange their ideas in pairs when they are given some instructions on ads to consider. The aim of the task preparation is not only preparing themselves for the following main task activity but also a warm-up time for them to focus on the language function and its context where negotiation of meaning is taking place.

Third, the main task process will last for 35 minutes that comprises 15 minutes' discussion and designing, the other 15 minutes for presentation and another 5 minutes for voting time. Both learners in a pair should give the presentation. Scratch papers will be given to the learners.

As the first step, the learners will start working in pairs from discussion to nailing down their ads design. During this process, they can look up the dictionary or ask the teacher for help. After that, the teacher will walk around the classroom, observe and take notes on the language mistakes they made (here we divide those potential mistakes into four parts: vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation and cohesion). In the pair-work, I can recognize that this pedagogical task has an activation rationale in that the learners are allowed to use any linguistic resources at their own disposal to complete the task by using various kinds of language functions. This idea is supported by Nunan (2004) pointing out that the aim of the task was to encourage the students to activate a wide variety of language functions and structures including making suggestions, agreeing, disagreeing, talking about quantity, how much/how many, and wh-questions. As an example of the teacher roles in the communicative classroom, Breen and Candlin (1980) claimed that the teacher has to act as a facilitator of the communicative process, as a participant, and as an observer and learner. Their idea

of teacher roles in the classroom reminds me of my former teacher as a scaffolder who can freely help the learners struggling to say something in a group discussion.

Then it's time to let the learners present their tourism ads to the class. As the teacher's role, it's necessary for us to make sure that they don't try to read what they have written down. The teacher will take notes on their presentation while listening as well. Right after each presentation is finished, other learners from the rest of the groups can ask questions to the presentation group. Here, as Willis (1996) identified creative tasks, one of the six kinds of tasks he presented, this presentation about the tourism ads can be associated with projects that involve pairs or groups of learners in some kind of freer creative work. Prior to giving a presentation, it would be explicitly necessary for the learners to engage in listing, ordering and sorting, comparing and sharing personal experiences in order to reach an agreement or make a decision on the best advertisement.

The final step is to vote for the best tourism advertisement. At this phase, the teacher will provide each group an evaluation form to rank other groups. Each learner needs to give their scores based on the discussion. Finally, the forms will be collected and the teacher will announce who is the winner. For this voting, it will take 5 minutes in total. As the evaluation form shows in an appendix B, it consists of 7 different questions all about the advertisement in which there are five scales available for every learner to choose from 1 as "strongly disagree" to 5 as "strongly agree." All the groups will rank other groups according to the standard shown in the table. The winner will be the one who gets the highest marks. For this voting here, as Willis (1996) has presented six task categories as aspects of tasks, one process of ranking that involves in ordering tasks and two processes of finding similarities and differences in comparing tasks may be used during this voting activity so that the learners are implicitly required to engage themselves in what advertisement is better than the others according to their personal values or specific criteria. I think the voting time also elicit them to choose the best one in their minds by comparing and evaluating the three group's ads based on the evaluation form. As shown in the appendix B, survey scales from 1 to 5 with 3 rated as neutral can be also helpful for them to respond to each question in a simple way.

Fourth, post-task is assigned for 13 minutes. The teacher will focus on language points that are mainly about the language mistakes each learner has made during the discussion, the presentation and the writing version of the advertisement. As a part of the class assignment, the learners will be asked to revise their advertisements and submit them in the next class. The teacher will give them further feedback on their revised advertisements. In this post-task activity here, reflection can be conducted at the very final stage of the classroom. According to the previous research done by Nunan (2004), presenting seven principles for task-based language teaching, learners should be given opportunities to reflect on what they learned and how well they are doing. Becoming a reflective learners is part of learner training where the focus shifts from language content to learning processes. From his perspective on the reflection, grammatical corrections made by the teacher

as the post-task for this lesson give the learners a chance to look back at what they actually did correctly through speaking in discussion and presentation or writing for creating the ads. Teacher's feedback on their revised ads would also help them to find out more about the appropriate language functions and its context by revising the first draft of writing and submitting it to the teacher.

In conclusion, as I have described the task-based lesson so far, this lesson plan and the teaching procedures would be so useful in communicative classroom settings that they can be carried out for B2 level of language users based on the CEFR. In fact, at the starting point of making this lesson plan, I have had a great influence on Willis and Willis (2007) suggesting that learner engagement in scenarios that reflect real-world language use is "done by designing tasks – discussions, problems, games, and so on – which require learners to use language for themselves." In addition, the reason why I think this TBLT is an ideal teaching resource is derived from the claim made by Nunan (2003). He asserted that in a recent study into the impact of the emergence of English as a global language on policies and practices in the Asia-Pacific region including Japan, Vietnam, China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Korea and Malaysia, government informants in all seven of the countries surveyed claimed that task-based teaching was a central principle driving the learners' English language curricula. I have ever heard that some of the secondary and international schools in Japan have already started content and language integrated learning (CLIL) in which the contents of social studies or science, for example, are embedded into the school curriculum as means of learning English. This tendency towards changing learning environments has attracted many language teachers including my colleagues and me to focus more on TBLT as one of the most beneficial teaching methodologies. Throughout this lesson plan, the design features and the teaching procedures that I have discussed above can be applied to both ESL and EFL classroom settings as the task-based language teaching.

References

- Andereck, L.K. *Evaluation of a Tourism Brochure* adapted from the source: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228782542>
- Breen, M. and Candlin, C. (1980). The essentials of a communicative curriculum in language teaching. *Language Learning*, 1, 2, 89-112.
- Clark, J. (1987). *Curriculum Renewal in School Foreign Language Learning*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Council of Europe. (2001). *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Pages 26-27.
- Ellis, R. (2003). *Task-Based Language Teaching and Learning*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Nunan, D. (2004). *Task-based language teaching*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Richards, J.C. (2001). *Curriculum Development in Language Teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Stevens, P. (1987). Interaction outside, the classroom; Using the community. In W. Rivers (ed.) *Interactive Language Teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Willis, D. (1996). *A Framework for Task-Based Learning*. London: Longman.
- Willis, D. and Willis, J. (2007). *Doing task-based teaching*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Atf_Aflq_5w

Appendix A: “Design Your Tourism Advertisement!”

- 1. Do you like travelling? What do you like to do when you travel?
- 2. Now think of a place where you might like to visit. What attracts you to it? Food, museum, scenery?
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Atf_Af1q5w (about 2 minutes)
- What do you like most about this promotional video?
- What do they want to promote in this video?



- Could you write down four things you can do based on the brochure you got?

Instructions for your ads:

- 1. It should include a slogan
- 2. it should include at least four things to do

Appendix B: Evaluation Form

Evaluation Form

No.	Question	Survey scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Neutral 4 = Agree 5 = Strongly Agree				
		1	2	3	4	5
1.	The advertisement is informative.					
2.	The advertisement has a nice slogan.					
3.	The information in the advertisement makes me want to visit the offered places.					
4.	The information is useful for trip planning.					
5.	The advertisement provides attracting places to visit.					
6.	The advertisement provides the place to eat.					
7.	The advertisement provides the place to stay.					

ALL the groups will rank OTHER groups according to the standard above. The winner will be the one who gets the HIGHEST marks.

(Adapted from the source: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228782542> Andereck, L. K. Evaluation of a Tourist Brochure)

Appendix C: Lesson Plan

“Design Your Tourism Advertisement”

Tell the learners that they will act as travel agencies representing a tourism destination. They are asked to run a campaign for the best tourism advertisement. The first stage is to encourage the learners to brainstorm. The second stage is to ask them to discuss and design an advertisement. The third stage is asking the learners to present their advertisement in front of the class. The fourth stage is to let the learners vote for the best advertisement and the winner will be awarded a box of chocolates. At the end of the class, teacher will explain some language points based on the language mistakes they have made.

1. Pre-task (10 minutes)

Teacher writes the questions on the board, as follows:

“Do you like travelling?” “What do you like to do when you travel?”

Elicit key words and phrases.

“Now think of a place where you might like to visit. What attracts you to it? Food, museum, scenery?”

Elicit key words and phrases.

In this step, teacher will try to elicit as many words and phrases as possible from the learners, and use “bubble scheme” to brainstorm. Then, a tourism promotional video on YouTube about “100% pure New Zealand” will be displayed at this stage for demonstration and listening practice. After watching the video, the teacher will ask some question to check their comprehension in listening. Then, tourism brochures about different countries and places will be handed out to the learners for reading.

2. Task preparation (2 minutes)

Ask the learners to work in pairs; [explain what they will do in pairs]

Then, the teacher will give them instruction regarding what to include in their advertisement.

3. Task (35 minutes)

The learners will start a discussion in pairs to nail down their ads design. During this process, they can look up the dictionary or ask the teacher for help. Then, the teacher will walk around the classroom, observe, and take notes on the language mistakes the learners made (here we classify those potential mistakes into four parts: vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and others). **(15 minutes)**

After that, the learners present their tourism ads to the class and the teacher takes notes on their presentation. Then, other learners can ask questions to the presentation group. **(15 minutes)**

The last step is to vote for the best tourism advertisement! At this stage, the teacher will provide each student with an evaluation form to rank other groups. Then the forms will be collected, and the teacher will announce who is the winner. **(5 minutes)**

4. Post-task (13 minutes)

The teacher at this stage will focus on language points, including the language mistakes the learners have made during discussion, presentation and writing version of the advertisement. The last part is to ask the learners to make a revision of their advertisement and submit it in next class.